



# Massachusetts Historical Society

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tude, and pleasure or disappointment was strongly depicted on their countenances, principally the latter. We now returned home and Mrs. Russell and Amelia went to visit Mrs. Bird and the Princess of Bellmonte, and did not return until half past eleven o'clock.

LAMON'S "LIFE OF LINCOLN."

UNION CLUB,  
BOSTON, December 5, 1910.

MY DEAR SIR:

I give you below my recollections of the incidents connected with the preparation and publication of the first volume of Lamon's "Life of Abraham Lincoln," the only volume of the work published. This volume was published in 1872 by James R. Osgood & Co., of which firm I was then a member, and I had full charge of the publication. You are at liberty to make such use of the following statement as may serve the purpose of historic truth. Very truly yours,

JOHN SPENCER CLARK.

HORACE WHITE, Esq.,  
18 West 69th Street,  
New York.

*I.* About 1868 I learned that W. H. Herndon was preparing a life of Mr. Lincoln, and that he had a quantity of fresh material that would throw new light on some phases of Mr. Lincoln's life and character. I opened correspondence in the name of my firm with Mr. Herndon with reference to the publication of his work. This correspondence was continued for some time, Mr. Herndon not being ready to submit his copy.

*II.* Some time in 1870 Col. Ward H. Lamon appeared on the scene as the owner of all the Herndon material, which he had purchased,<sup>1</sup> and also as the possessor of much other valuable material which he had procured through his acquaintance and semi-official connection with Mr. Lincoln, and he came prepared "to talk business" in the matter of publication. I was convinced that Colonel Lamon had the material, and he stated that this material was to be used and put in literary form by Chauncey Black, a clever writer, and a son of Jeremiah Black, a tough, hard-headed old democrat of the pro-slavery school, and a leading, if not the dominating spirit on constitutional questions in the Buchanan Cabinet.

*III.* I raised objection to a life of Mr. Lincoln being prepared under such apparently hostile influences, and Colonel Lamon as-

<sup>1</sup> See Newton, *Lincoln and Herndon*, 306.

sured me that nothing politically hostile to Mr. Lincoln should go into the work; that Mr. Black was a great admirer of Mr. Lincoln, and that the work should be in full sympathy with the fundamental points in Mr. Lincoln's life and character. Colonel Lamon later brought Mr. Black to see me, and he also assured me of his loyalty to Mr. Lincoln, and his good faith in presenting the political aspects of his career. On the strength of these assurances we entered into a contract for publication.

IV. While the proofs of the early chapters as they came in to me showed a lack of appreciation of the finer qualities of Mr. Lincoln's nature, and a disposition to keep the rougher, coarser, aspects of his pioneer life prominent, I saw nothing I could positively object to until I received the proofs of Chapter xv, purporting to give a brief history of the Kansas struggle. Here I saw well known historic facts perverted to shield the pro-slavery democratic party from "high crimes and misdemeanors" in their attempt to bring in Kansas as a slave state. I protested to Colonel Lamon that the account was not only untrue, but was also wholly inconsistent with Mr. Lincoln's position on the Kansas question. After considerable discussion and the exhibition of much feeling on the part of Mr. Black, Colonel Lamon fully sustained me and authorized me to substitute the text as it now stands in place of what had been prepared by Mr. Black.

V. This experience with the Kansas matter made me suspicious of Mr. Black's good faith, and when the proofs came of the chapter pretending to give an historic record of the very memorable period between Mr. Lincoln's election and his inauguration, it was only too evident that justice to Mr. Lincoln during this critical period was sacrificed to an effort to extenuate if not excuse the shambling policy of the Buchanan administration — a policy which weakly supported the Constitution with one hand, while attacking it vigorously with the other hand. I put the matter squarely before Colonel Lamon and he saw the unwisdom, if not the absurdity, of compromising Mr. Lincoln in the slightest degree at this great period when in the tremendous swirl of political complications his was the sanest mind of all — sanest not only because he stood for the Union, but also for the inherent power of the Union under the Constitution to protect itself.

Mr. Black's effort to condone the interpretation of the Constitution by the Buchanan Administration during its last days — an interpretation which Mr. Lincoln had to fight during his whole term — in a life of Lincoln, was therefore unceremoniously cut out, as appears at the bottom of page 527; and although I have not

a distinct recollection of the details that followed, I do know that Mr. Black was greatly angered, that there was a split, and that we got no more copy for the work.

VI. Colonel Lamon impressed me as a man of fair intelligence and good sense, gained by a sort of rough and tumble experience, and while in no way a man of literary culture or of positive convictions in regard to the higher phases of Mr. Lincoln's character, he was an admirer of Mr. Lincoln as an honest political statesman, and in the matter of having Mr. Lincoln's life truly set forth he only needed to have the truth shown to him to stand by it. I think he at first put full confidence in Black, that there was a sort of good-fellowship understanding between them that was "busted" when Lamon saw clearly that Black's adherence to the flesh-pots of his democratic faith was stronger than his desire to see full justice done to Mr. Lincoln's memory.

VII. The publication of the work, which was entered upon with a belief in its historic importance, and high anticipation of its commercial success, came, with the publication of the first volume, to an untimely end. No more work was done upon it and the undertaking proved a losing venture all around; and I came to class the outcome as among those publishing experiences which show the futility of endeavoring to combine essentially antagonistic elements in the production of an important literary work.



